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“How long does it take?”: The Resurrection of Marilyn Monroe and Something’s Got to Give (1962)

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“How long does it take?”: The Resurrection of Marilyn Monroe and Something’s Got to Give (1962)

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Amidst the raw footage and few completed sequences that remain of Something’s Got to Give (George Cukor, 1962), Marilyn Monroe’s final, unfinished film, is a scene between the actress and co-star Dean Martin. Here, Ellen Arden/Monroe – believed dead after five years shipwrecked on a South Sea Island – scolds her husband, Nick/Martin, for not telling his new bride that his first wife has, in fact, just returned to her family. Facing Nick/Martin with wet hair and in the blue robe associated with the now-legendary nude swimming sequence, Ellen/Monroe exclaims, “How long does it take a man to tell a woman that his wife’s back?...I just did it in two seconds – you’ve had two days!”

This sense of vexed temporality – “How long does it take?” – was one that characterized both the narrative and making of Something’s Got to Give. An early sequence, for example, depicts Nick and his second wife, Bianca (played by Cyd Charisse), waiting for a judge to finally declare Ellen dead so that they may be wed; but following this (inadvertently bigamous) union, Ellen returns home to her children, who do not remember her. Nick’s delay in revealing Ellen’s survival leaves Bianca unaware of her present limbo, and she consults an analyst over her husband’s continued refusal to consummate their marriage. On an extra-diegetic level, biographies and documentaries profiling Monroe offer an equally troubled chronology for the production itself: These accounts set forth the number of days the star was absent from the set and so delayed filming, as well as at what point in the difficult process Twentieth-Century Fox

fired her – and how soon she died thereafter. In 1963, Something's Got to Give would be revised and released as Move Over, Darling (Michael Gordon), starring Doris Day and James Garner.¹

It was only in 2001, decades after the film footage was abandoned to the Fox vaults, that audiences finally glimpsed an edited version of Something's Got to Give in the documentary Marilyn Monroe: The Final Days (directed by Patty Ivins Specht). Twinning didactic commentary and long-awaited fiction, the work opens with an hour-long account of the troubled 1962 production, introducing footage that is subsequently reconstructed in a 37-minute “movie” – one that, according to the voice-over narration read by James Coburn, follows “vintage scripts and notes from the studio archives...[with] special attention given to the original intention of [director] George Cukor and Twentieth-Century Fox.” Yet this re-vision of Something's Got to Give, created through what the voice-over describes as “state-of-the-art digital technology,” grants more than “one last look at a film that might have been, and a star who will live on screen forever.” Indeed, the 2001 docu-reconstruction both appeals to and presages a broader pop-culture fascination with Monroe's own reanimation through digital technology – attesting as much to the conjuring powers of new media as to the “intentions” of the original work and Monroe's performance themselves. This article, then, will consider The Final Days as a work that distills the often-uneasy questions of embodiment and automation, old media and contemporary technology, that surround modern-day representations of not only Marilyn Monroe, but classical Hollywood itself.

In considering the many extra- and intra-diegetic delays that shadowed Something's Got to Give, as well as The Final Days' own play upon the dual pleasures of nostalgia and

¹ Something's Got to Give was itself a remake of Leo McCarey's 1940 comedy My Favorite Wife, starring Cary Grant and Irene Dunne.

anticipation, Laura Mulvey's recent theorization of an entire cinema of delay offers an especially productive critical framework. In her examination of the relationship between new media and film history, Mulvey posits that the former enables a delayed cinematic experience – one (re)defined by the spectator's ability to pause, slow down, or repeat favorite sequences within a given movie (2006: 147). Analyzing the kindred registers of stasis and death, Mulvey further notes that the contemplative delights of delayed cinema inspire a graver recognition of the still frames that historically comprised motion pictures, and so bring about "the association with death usually concealed by the film's movement" (186). She outlines the cinema of delay in terms of both the literal deceleration of the moving image and the revelation of an element (gesture, object, feature of *mise en scène*) that had "lain dormant" before the "pensive spectatorship" of the modern-day viewer (8, 186); and she points out that this contemplative gaze may also muse upon the extra-diegetic context of the film, regarding studio sets and stars themselves as "documents" of "the pro-filmic scene" (160, 184).

This concern with the dialogue between off-screen history and on-screen fiction recalls Vivian Sobchack's assertion that the extra-filmic knowledge of the viewer guides his/her identification with a given movie. That is, the spectator may oscillate between regarding the unfolding images as "memory, fiction, or document" (1999: 253) within a single cinematic form according to his/her individual awareness. Indeed, in approaching the concept of the cinema of delay from the perspective of embodied visibility, the isolation of particular elements within a movie generates a sensory resonance as well as a cinephilic pleasure. Not only musing upon, but sharing in what Sobchack has called each film's process "of being and becoming" (1992: 9), the viewer may engage in a proximate as well as pensive spectatorship. And as a given cinematic

body shifts in its points-of-view on the world, it calls upon the commensurate versatility of the spectator's own lived perspective.

As a figure whose life has rivaled her film roles for drama and public interest, Monroe herself has arguably inspired a spectatorship that shifts between an immersion in her performance as fiction and a preoccupation with her biography. Indeed, the very structure of The Final Days – offering extra-filmic accounts of Monroe's last months as a prelude to her abbreviated characterization of Ellen Arden – calls upon this tendency by imbuing Monroe's performance in the reconstruction with, to borrow Sobchack's terms, a "charge of the real" (1999: 253). Yet the almost compulsive deceleration of footage of Monroe in the documentary highlights the continuum of delay, stasis, and death that, as Mulvey argues, underlies the motility of cinema itself (186) – in this way defining the star's charge of the real as the charge of mortality. If Something's Got to Give was itself originally conceived as a comedic fairy tale of resurrection, then its 2001 incarnation offers an expressly mournful envisioning of Monroe's own longed-for return; finally bringing her "back to life," as it were, only to linger over her untimely end.

In a nexus between technical effect and emotional affect, then, The Final Days crafts a visual pleasure uniquely enabled by the capacities of new media: uniting the pensive gratification evoked by the delayed presentation of Something's Got to Give with an envisioning of Monroe's own posthumous return to the screen; and, in so doing, highlighting the fluctuation between past and present, reality and fiction intrinsic to the cinematic experience. Ultimately, as the following will discuss, the twinned filmic bodies of documentary and reconstructed-fiction frame Monroe within a running time in which she must slow down for the audience's contemplation – while catching up to its anticipation.

Behind the scenes

In her discussion of the “commercial management of memory” (2006: 132) by cable-television networks, Barbara Klinger remarks that “classic films are not born; they are made by various media, educational, and other agencies interested in revitalizing old properties” (94). Certainly the myriad documentaries and biographies of Monroe have rendered Something’s Got to Give, however incomplete, a classic of the star’s canon; an exhibit, as it were, in what Klinger calls the “cine-museum” of nostalgic fascination with golden-age movies and stars (ibid). For though The Final Days presents the most extensive treatment of the making of the film, earlier documentary projects also explored its production: In 1963, Twentieth-Century Fox released a tribute to Monroe entitled Marilyn (Harold Medford), which featured footage from the unfinished film as well as clips from her earlier movies for the studio; and in 1990, Marilyn: Something’s Got to Give (director uncredited) was broadcast on television and subsequently made available on VHS. A kind of prelude to The Final Days, the 1990 work also included interviews with co-stars and crew – but without the edited reconstruction that distinguished the later documentary from other accounts. Divided by decades but united by the material itself, these docu-tributes recount the history of a production fraught with tensions: between producers and studio-executives desperate to recuperate the costs wrought by the simultaneous filming of Joseph L. Mankiewicz’ epic Cleopatra (1963), an equally tumultuous production famed for Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton’s love affair; between director Cukor and Monroe’s isolating entourage; and finally,

those challenges faced by the actress herself, who dealt with illness and chemical dependency throughout most of the production.²

Upon the 2001 broadcast of The Final Days on cable network American Movie Classics and release in the “Marilyn Monroe: The Diamond Collection” VHS/DVD collection, an article in the Los Angeles Times discussed the making of the documentary and featured an interview with executive producer Kevin Burns.³ Describing the process of watching over nine hours of archival material, Burns remarked, “It forced me to speculate that if one were to cut this together, was there anything like a movie or a story here?” Burns and his production team went on to craft the 37-minute reconstruction of Something’s Got to Give through what he termed “surgical editing”; yet in the interview, he countered the ostensible cohesiveness of the final product with commentary on what he perceived as the fragmented quality of Monroe’s on-screen presence. With the star often unwell during the filming, and absent 17 out of 30 days of production, Burns relates that his editors had to “look for moments of clarity, moments of lucidity” in the footage and assemble them “to put Marilyn into some kind of performance.” Indeed, Burns’ beleaguered tone suggests that even decades after her death and the conclusion of the production, Monroe still comes across as aggravatingly difficult on the set: “When you lay out the story of the production, day by day, scene by scene, you really see the disintegration of a human being. She wasn’t capable of performing and wasn’t performing.”

² For an in-depth account of Monroe’s final days, see Donald Spoto’s authoritative biography (especially 536 – 662). Here, Spoto outlines more thoroughly the script problems and personal circumstances – particularly her troubling treatment by doctors – that led to Monroe’s challenging behavior on the set.

³ Susan King, “Marilyn Monroe’s Last Film Work Resurrected for New Documentary.”

<<http://articles.latimes.com/2001/may/28/entertainment/ca-3440>> (accessed 21 November, 2013).

Certainly the documentary itself expounds upon this statement. Featuring interviews with, among others, co-star Charisse, producer Henry Weinstein, and Monroe's physician Dr. Hyman Engelberg, The Final Days details the actress's prescription-drug dependency and alleged unhappy love affairs with John F. and Robert Kennedy. Highlighting Monroe's ill health and emotional instability throughout the filming, this narrative of Monroe's last months ("When you lay out the story of the production") ultimately asserts the inevitability of her tragedy – revealing in this way a teleological impulse that, as critics S. Paige Baty and Esther Sonnet have pointed out, characterizes much of the posthumous commentary on Monroe.⁴ If, as Mulvey posits, new media technology "offers an opportunity to look back to the... 'then' of the indexical image, in the changing light of the 'after,' the 'now'" (21), then the documentary portion of The Final Days insists that viewers regard the footage of Monroe in the shadow of her death.

Even before its title appears on the screen, the documentary aligns Monroe's mortality with delayed imagery in order to craft an overtly melancholic materiality. Offering glimpses of footage in which Monroe appears buoyant in mood and healthy in appearance, the voice-over prologue sets the scene for its "making-of" account of Something's Got to Give; yet as this narration begins to address the challenges of the production, the images of the star slow down.

⁴ Baty and Sonnett address the teleological elements included in chronicles of Monroe's death and career, respectively. Baty discusses the "cartographic rememberings" that "map" conspiracy theories of Monroe's death: "As events are woven together within the framework of the conspiracy narrative, a chain of causes and effects are traced back to those who engaged in the plotting – the making up – of the historical. In other words, the cartographic mode of remembering is enacted as the emplotting of what has always already occurred as plot" (1995: 124 – 125). In terms of Monroe's career, Sonnett points out that "historical conditions of real uncertainty [have been] converted by the teleological trajectory into a retrospective narrative that admits nothing of the instability of the process of star construction" (2010: 66).

Returning to wardrobe-test sequences that had run at their intended speed only a minute before, the documentary links the deceleration of the images with the deterioration of the movie and Monroe herself. As a montage of clips-in-delay features the actress shaking hair out of her face, blinking at the camera in close-up, and turning her head to smile, the commentary states, “...Only eight weeks after production began, Marilyn Monroe was fired. Two months later, the star was found dead of an apparent sleeping pill overdose.” Upon these last words, a slow-motion Monroe smiles and looks down to close her eyes – her action and expression, though innocuous in their original context, appearing rueful and even elegiac in their prolonged duration. Where the latent stillness of motion pictures represents, as Mulvey remarks, the “hidden past” of cinema “that might or might not find its way to the surface” (67), this delay of Monroe’s image signals an attempt to reveal her own mournful, once-hidden future.

As it continues, The Final Days reinforces this connection between technical effect and emotional affect. A lingering outtake allows the audience to contemplate what the voice-over describes as Monroe’s “raw nerves noticeably close to the surface”; and as Charisse recalls the numerous times that the actress ran up and down a flight of stairs for a scene, attempting to perfect her performance, slow-motion footage makes manifest the tedium of the filming. Perhaps most markedly, the documentary also employs delays in its presentation of the wardrobe tests. Heightening what Graham McCann had years earlier called the “hieratic, ritual magic” (109) of these sequences, the work draws out the rhythm of Monroe’s walk and gestures as she models hairstyles and costumes.

One early segment showing the tests even engages with the parameters of the still frame itself, while musing upon the actress’s thwarted ability “to function” in life and on the set. As if making material her dysfunction, the documentary here offers a slowed-down Monroe as she

turns her head and laughs in close-up; there follows a fade-in to a strip of film documenting a similar (if not the same) test session. With Monroe's movements now completely displaced to those of the film strip itself, the latter moves gradually to allow for a perusal of the star in a bikini – until its rapid acceleration blurs the images and creates the impression of the strip running through a projector. Mulvey has argued that in classic films, the posing of the star underlies the motility of the movie, in this way recalling cinema's own fusion between motion and stasis (162); yet at this moment, the deceleration of the film signals Monroe's personal state of deterioration: her static pose in the swimsuit indicative not so much of the "stillness of display" latent in screen presence, but rather the existential stasis that awaited her. In constructing this continuum of motility – from the real time of Monroe's original movements to their delay, then dwindling to stasis before suddenly awakening in a frenetic quickening that eludes the gaze altogether – the documentary demands that the spectator ponder the deceleration and fragmentation of the actress's on- and off- screen self.

Admittedly, The Final Days also intermittently uses the motif of delay in its editing of other figures' images. Voice-over narration or interviewee accounts detailing Charisse's professionalism and Martin's good humor (and eventual frustration), for example, overlay slow-motion clips of the stars; and a lingering nod from alleged paramour Robert F. Kennedy in a piece of news footage complements commentary on the affair. Particularly striking, however, is a slow-motion series of images of the Twentieth-Century Fox studio lot. Shown about ten minutes into the documentary, the clip illustrates a point about the studio as a "ghost town" during the production of Something's Got to Give, referencing the financial troubles wrought by the costly

simultaneous filming of Cleopatra.⁵ In long-shot and infused with Technicolor tones, the (ironically) fleeting clip shows a crowd of people teeming en masse toward the studio buildings, which stand in the background behind a bleak parking lot and chain-link fence. Only the emblazoned Fox logo, appearing not unlike the “Hollywood” sign in its iconic resonance and towering height, identifies the studio as such; indeed, there is a curious suspension to the landscape only heightened by the delay of its image.

Extracted from an unknown source, the slow-motion sequence presents a mystery to the spectator: When was it filmed? Who exactly comprises the procession – crew, contract-players, even stars? Is this a documentary image or diegetic excerpt from a “back-lot” film – or, moreover, simply a stage set of the studio lot? Shifting from the insulation of the Something’s Got to Give soundstage and the neutral settings of the featured interviews, this sequence offers a glimpse into a vaster, uncanny context for Monroe’s “final days.” Sobchack has remarked that documentaries select images of their subject(s) in order to present “a specific...insight into a general comportment or broader occurrence,” with the “progression and accumulation” of these images granting the spectator a greater understanding of individuals s/he does not personally know, or events s/he has not directly experienced (1999: 250). In imposing a meditation on this processional, however, and utilizing the trope of delay so associated with Monroe’s image, the documentary suggests an existential affinity – a kinship – between the anonymous inhabitants of Fox’s “ghost town” and one of its greatest stars. As The Final Days introduces the element of

⁵ Spoto records figures that detail the studio’s predicament: “In June 1961, Fox had 29 producers, 41 writers and 2154 employees on its weekly payroll, working on 31 films; there were now [in 1962] 15 producers, 9 writers and 606 staff for only 9 films” (561).

slow-motion to unknown masses of the studio system and hyper-determined legend alike, the work depicts the progress of both as a somber, entwined trajectory toward deterioration.

“Anything like a movie”

Though today rarely seen in their original celluloid incarnations, classic films viewed through new media technologies nonetheless “allow” for what Mulvey calls “an easy return to the hidden stillness of the film frame” (66). With the spectator’s ability to pause a given image and consider it in the guise of its original cinematic form – a single frame in a reel of still images – the film itself may seem to appear, as Mulvey goes on to describe it, like a “beautiful automaton...stuck in a particular pose” (52). Indeed, she discusses the sadistic drive of the spectator’s possessive rather than pensive desire to pause and restart – reanimate – the moving image, noting that the repetition of a star’s performance for fetishistic pleasure awakens associations with automata and inorganic forms (171).

Certainly this concept of cinematic automata diverges from the dynamic, subjective cinematic entities perceived through embodied visibility; and indeed, the flux between movement and stillness, life and death, that Mulvey illuminates in terms of the inorganic arguably encapsulates the very vicissitudes of the lived experience itself. As film and star shift between registers of motion, each responding to the rhythms of the other, they enact a corporeal potential for precision and poise that is, for all its exactitude, not the exclusive province of eerie automata. Transposing these questions of the mechanical and organic to the reconstructed version of Something’s Got to Give, however, evokes the consideration of a hybrid filmic form: a being, that is, at once automated by the possessive impetus of the “surgical editing” capabilities (to recall Burns’ phrase) of contemporary technology – but still composed of the elements of the

original filmic body. The edited version represents, then, cinematic reincarnation through remediation.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have analyzed the “double logic” at play in the process of remediation, noting the paradoxical but compelling demands for hypermediacy and immediacy in a visual culture that “wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them” (2000: 5). Such inherent duality gives rise to what the theorists call “the hybrid character of film” itself (67), as each trip to a movie theater entails an engagement with associated media like trailers and posters – while at home, audiences interact with the DVD menus and “special features” that accompany a single film. Bolter and Grusin have further set forth that classic films and stars are themselves currently “caught in the logic of hypermediacy” (82); that is, continually remediated within DVD formats, cable-television showings, and online clips edited by fans.

With its own enactment of the double logic of remediation, The Final Days inadvertently highlights this process of entrapment. Throughout the hypermediated documentary portion of the work, effects like the sound of flashbulbs popping, or glimpses of contact sheets and reels of film shown frame-by-frame, suggest a fascination with the various apparatuses of visual media; while, of course, the manipulation of the archival footage itself, as well as other moving images of Monroe, make evident the presence of contemporary technology. Particularly striking are the shots leading up to the presentation of the revised Something’s Got to Give: As the voice-over describes the “painstaking editing process” enabled by “state-of-the-art digital technology,” a series of shots reveal reels of film in an archive, producers in an editing suite, and even glimpses of the movie as seen through the monitors of the restoration equipment.

The reconstruction itself, however, strives for the immediacy of which Bolter and Grusin write – giving the impression, that is, that this version of Something’s Got to Give stands as a sui

generis cinematic experience. Following a brief fade to black, the familiar Twentieth-Century Fox icon appears in CinemaScope, complete with fanfare; and a cheerful title sequence features Frank Sinatra's rendition of the titular song over animated credits. Throughout the 37-minute work, extra-diegetic music scores the scenes, which simply transition in sequence (however abridged) without intertitles to clarify plot points. Yet the hypermediated quality that defined much of the documentary underlies the apparent immediacy of this digital "unreeling": The famed swimming scene, for example, appears extended, with a sense of protraction heightened by the anachronistic inclusion of nudity that the ratings system of the time would have prohibited. Most of the footage itself, now shown at its intended speed, had already been glimpsed in slow-motion in the documentary; and the recollection of various outtakes ghosts those scenes and shots that were chosen for this belated "final cut." Moreover, after the pensive spectatorship demanded by the documentary, a near-Kuleshov effect tempers the *re*-remediation of Monroe's scenes. A shot/reverse-shot series between child actors and Monroe in close-up, for example, or with co-star Phil Silvers in the swimming sequence, seem more like arbitrary interruptions in the duration of her moving image than timely intercuts demanded by the rhythm of the narrative.

Indeed, by the conclusion of the reconstruction, the gestures toward immediacy cede utterly to hypermediated effects – returning, once again, to the trope of delay. Following a scripted exchange between Martin and Monroe, the soundtrack suddenly reveals Cukor's voice saying "cut, thank you"; and the footage begins to decelerate before finally fading to black. Marking the end of the scene and the fiction itself, the movie literally winds down to its closing, as if reluctant to end a cine-existence so long awaited. Further (re)emphasizing the poignancy of the material – the charge of mortality that was ostensibly latent for the duration of the movie –

are the closing titles that dedicate the reconstruction to its deceased stars and director. If the opening credits invited an optimistic suspension of disbelief/extra-diegetic awareness, then the somber closing memorial attests to its impossibility. Like the instants of stillness that underlie the motion of cinema itself, the revelation of hypermediacy within the context – or pretext – of the reconstruction’s immediacy suggests that this is a body mechanized rather than lived; a “beautiful automaton,” in Mulvey’s terms, slowing down in its performative function. To return to his own words, Burns had approached the project by wondering “if one were to cut [the raw footage] together, was there anything like a movie or a story here?” – and what resulted was, in fact, just that: a work “like a movie” that re-incorporated the original elements of Something’s Got to Give through contemporary machinery.

Of course, as mentioned earlier, the unfinished film has continually found modes of remediation since its abandonment in 1962: the various documentaries on Monroe, for example, that are available on both VHS and DVD; and even a recent book of photographs taken on the set by Lawrence Schiller.⁶ Attesting to the engulfing influence of the new media wave, moreover, is the streaming of Something’s Got to Give footage on YouTube, with various scenes, outtakes, and costume tests – from various sources – available in myriad minutes-long clips. In a particularly vertiginous instance of remediation, The Final Days and its edited version of Something’s Got to Give are themselves available on the website – the footage so “surgically edited” now susceptible to further manipulation by fans and possessive spectators alike. Sobchack has written of the cinematic form’s propensity, like that of its human counterpart, for maturation, as production techniques gradually become obsolete and make way for subsequent “generations” (1992: 252); and indeed, the edited reconstruction of Something’s Got to Give

⁶ *Marilyn and Me: A Photographer’s Memories*, 2012.

belongs less to the “CinemaScope splendor” of the original footage, as cited in the documentary, than the technological trends of the contemporary mediascape.

Heightening this anachronistic sensibility, YouTube’s viewing windows feature a still-frame function that breaks each instant of footage into individual shots, allowing viewers to replay or fast-forward to a given moment at will. With this union between the historicity of the still frame and the sophistication of the interface, the YouTube “reels” materialize the registers of action and stillness, anticipation and gratification, so entwined in moving imagery – as well as the broader intertwining of analogue and digital media. Through these interactive exhibits within the cine-museum of which Klinger wrote, Something’s Got to Give endures as a hybrid figure: retaining the affect of discrete embodied elements – those shots and scenes that preserve Martin’s suaveness and Charisse’s comic flair; Monroe’s fabled luminosity and the wistfulness of her characterization – within hypermediated contexts. In this way, the delayed cinema of The Final Days highlights less “the illusion of...movement” (52) in film, to borrow from Mulvey, than the illusion of cohesion in an age of new media.

Living on Screens

As mentioned earlier, The Final Days describes its reconstruction of Something’s Got to Give as “one last look at a film that might have been, and a star who will live on screen forever.” As the reconstruction itself demonstrates, however, the notion of “living on screen” bears with it more challenging questions of embodiment, automation, and the stakes of remediation; questions that, in the contemporary mediascape, extend especially to Monroe. Like Something’s Got to Give itself, Monroe lives on any number of what critic Will Straw has termed the “proliferating screens” of new media – from television sets to computer and iPad screens, YouTube viewing windows and mobile phones – and, moreover, within myriad books (both fictional and

biographical) and merchandise representations. In 1995, Baty described Monroe as “never fully situated in any one time or place, but rather...reproduced and disseminated ad infinitum” (21), a characterization of the star’s cultural circulation that presaged contemporary concerns with remediation. Indeed, where Baty employs the concept of the matrix to consider Monroe’s “appearance in mass-mediated channels” (59), one could today discuss her place within the network of visual culture.

The pop-culture fixation on Monroe’s reincarnation through these modern-day proliferating screens may ultimately be traced to the elemental, even historical fascination with the indexical properties of film itself. With a “magical and uncanny” affect, as Mulvey writes, “the presence of the past in the cinema is also the presence of the body resurrected,” and in this way it invites a contemplation of “the fragility of human life and the boundary between life and death” (52-53). New media, of course, enables an almost compulsive “resurrection” of a filmic body, in terms of both a movie and its star: The elegiac process of delaying footage of Monroe in The Final Days, for example, allows the audience to (re)consider her filmic form in both the minutiae of its every nuance and the greater context of biography; and the “surgical editing” of Something’s Got to Give directly engages with the reconstructive machinery of contemporary technologies. Lisa Cohen has written eloquently of Monroe’s affinity (in terms of bodily and cultural identity) with the CinemaScope process and its “questions of excess, containment, and visibility” in the postwar era (273); yet the modern-day manipulation and networking of Monroe’s image suggest that The Final Days offers a contemporary version of this twinning between star and cinematographic process. In its flux between pensive and possessive visuality, through which the desire to contemplate the cinematic body may cede to the desire to control it,

The Final Days stands as only one contribution to a broader project of resurrection – that is, the cultural preoccupation with bringing Marilyn Monroe back to life.

Monroe belongs to an entire pantheon of classic stars for whom a second career, as it were, has become possible. Lisa Bode has traced a history of efforts to reanimate screen figures, beginning in the 1930s – when Jean Harlow vehicle Saratoga (Jack Conway, 1937) was completed after her death through the use of a double – through to a recent posthumous “performance” by Nancy Marchand in The Sopranos (49, 54). Digital imaging can also reintroduce stars in milieux far beyond their original cinematic situation: Citing Fred Astaire and James Cagney’s appearances in recent advertisements, for instance, Bode notes that digital imaging can place the star “not just within new scenes but within new mise-en-scène” (51). A striking example of this is an advertisement for Galaxy chocolate “starring” an avatar of Audrey Hepburn (released in February 2013) – as well as a September 2011 commercial for Dior “J’Adore” perfume, in which Charlize Theron stalks through a fashion show where digitally-animated legends like Monroe, Marlene Dietrich, and Grace Kelly mill around. Only months before the release of the commercial, the Guardian film blog reported that a Toronto businessman had bought the rights to Monroe’s image and was negotiating with film studios to create her digital avatar⁷; and on 1 June, 2012 (what would have been the star’s 86th birthday), The Hollywood Reporter revealed that she would soon “star” in a concert extravaganza – as a hologram. In the latter article, the co-founder of Digicon Media heralded the concert as the

⁷ James McMahon, “Hello, Norma Jean...” <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/2011/feb/04/marilyn-monroe-cgi-star-film>> (accessed 21 November, 2013).

introduction of Monroe's 21st-century identity as "a performer, spokesperson, cultural pundit and computer avatar."⁸ Or, to recall Mulvey's phrase, beautiful automaton.

Indeed, Digicon's website profiles its plans for what it calls "Virtual Marilyn" in terms that underscore the troubling stakes of digital disembodiment – and are worth quoting at length. Noting that "Hollywood's favorite Marilyn Monroe actress and performer," Susan Griffiths, would "supervise the development" of Virtual Marilyn, the site declares that the impersonator

...is the world's foremost student and authority on the performance persona of Marilyn Monroe created by Norma Jeane Mortensen. She will assure the fans around the world...that the persona of Marilyn adopted by VM2-Virtual Marilyn, will be meticulously faithful to Norma Jeane's creation in all its applications as a computer generated media icon.⁹

Approaching the "persona" of Marilyn Monroe as an abstract "creation" of Norma Jeane Mortensen – and, in this way, implicitly identifying Monroe's pre-Hollywood identity as her authentic, "real" **self** – **and** aligning itself not so much with "Norma Jeane's" version/vision of Monroe but that of a professional impersonator, Digicon offers a literally surreal world in which, it seems, Monroe's indexical relationship to film is secondary to her iconic, imitable attributes.

The Twilight Zone-esque commentary continues, as Digicon predicts that

[e]ntertainment and media companies will be increasingly drawn to creating and branding "virtual actors" who are non-fungible (they don't age, develop personality issues, have vices or accidents) and completely controllable by their

⁸ Eriq Gardner, "Marilyn Monroe Hologram Concert..." <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/holograms-tupac-shakur-marilyn-monroe-legal-330982>> (accessed 21 November, 2013).

⁹< http://www.digiconmedia.net/Home_Page.php> (accessed 28 November, 2013). Emphases added.

owners...Now, by imbuing the first virtual actress for all media with Marilyn's persona and mystique, and providing her with an eternal life in cyberspace, Virtual Marilyn will establish her own trailblazing career as a "digital" personality contributing to and participating in the global popular culture.¹⁰

Digicon's heralding of a new generation of "synthespians" – and its naming of Monroe as the "first" among them – provoked a cease-and-desist letter from representatives for the star's estate, who argued against this exploitation of her image¹¹; but in August 2012, an Appeals Court ruled that, in fact, Monroe's image belongs to the public rather than the heirs to her estate.¹² Akin to a visual culture that is, as Wheeler Winston Dixon has recently remarked, "expanding second by second, image by image" without a stabilizing "center" – because "[n]o one person can ever control it" (2013: 165) – Monroe herself circulates freely through media networks and commercial enterprises alike. As Virtual Marilyn suggests, Monroe's image may now literally assume a (digital) life of its own, eerily independent of the "centering" force (to adopt Dixon's terms) provided by not just the photographic index, but her very subjectivity as a performer.

These recent legal issues intertwine with more theoretical concerns over digital disembodiment. Mulvey has written of a "technological uncanny" that accompanies the

¹⁰ <http://www.digiconmedia.net/VM2_Virtual_Mariyln.html> (accessed 28 November, 2013) Note the misspelling of Monroe's first name.

¹¹ Eriq Gardner, "Marilyn Monroe Estate Threatens Legal Action Over Hologram" <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/marilyn-monroe-estate-hologram-legal-334817>> (accessed 28 November, 2013).

¹² Eriq Gardner, "Appeals Court Rules Marilyn Monroe's Persona Belongs to Public, Not Her Estate" <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/appeals-court-rules-marilyn-monroes-image-public-estate-367160>> (accessed 28 November, 2013).

experience of special effects “not yet fully understood” by their audience (27) – a sense of unease especially associated with those bodies created or enhanced by digital animation. Exceeding the “magical” (52) properties inherent within the (re)awakening of the index, the technological uncanny now displaces that quasi-fantastic sensibility onto the effect itself. The questions of technological style over embodied substance are challenging enough when related to the wholly digitally-animated form; what, then, of its imposition upon a figure like Monroe, whose very oeuvre attests to her material complexity? How to adjust to the transformation from “flesh impact” – legendary in the enduring affect of its indexical form – to the virtual veneer crafted by pixels and binary code? Where the edited version of Something’s Got to Give offers audiences a revised representation of original material, however uneasy in conception and execution, more unsettling is the digital “Marilyn Monroe” that appears in the Dior advertisement: her face malformed, almost smudged-looking, as she burbles the name of the perfume.¹³

It would follow, then, that each of these new re-presentations of Monroe in visual culture – as hologram, avatar, commercial spokesperson, and even as posthumous star of the hyper/remediated Something’s Got to Give – signals a further digression from her original cine-existence. In a mediascape in which DVDs and websites already offer what Mulvey terms “non-linear access” to classic narrative works (27), in this way fragmenting the filmic body itself, digital animation offers non-indexical access to the image of the star – here erasing, rather than

¹³ Interestingly, The Marilyn Monroe Estate cites this “Marilyn” as a “superior...virtual character...” (Gardner, “Marilyn Monroe Estate Threatens...”)

simply fragmenting, the intentionality of the original corporeal form.¹⁴ From the vastness of her CinemaScope frame, Monroe has, like many of her golden-age contemporaries, been networked among proliferating screens that disperse not only her image but **also** her animated double. Yet ironically, one of the very productions that makes evident the challenges of remediation also holds a means of reconciling technological vogue and indexical integrity: that is, The Final Days and its inclusion of the *unreconstructed* footage of Something's Got to Give.

For though the documentary characterizes the edited version as “one last look at a film that might have been,” it is in fact the basic material of the costume tests, completed scenes, and outtakes themselves that comprise the conditional existence of Something's Got to Give in all its inherent promise and difficulties. For example, as discussed earlier, The Final Days decelerates clips of Monroe walking back and forth across a room in wardrobe tests in order to represent the breaking-down of her psyche and professionalism; yet when shown at their original speed, the images do not illustrate such a troubled biographical narrative. Instead, they present a woman who patiently offers herself as an object for the camera's gaze, smiling and, at one point in her pacing, throwing her arms up in the air and turning around to laugh. The gesture is ambiguous, but does not need to be slowed down in order for the spectator to infer something of its meaning: rueful acknowledgment of the many eyes watching her, or of the necessity of having to make another promenade across the room; even, perhaps, a cheerful impatience with the continuation of a tedious process – or the delay in its completion.

Indeed, the story of the making of Something's Got to Give is already told in the footage itself, independent of that narrative introduced by the documentary commentary and editing. The

¹⁴ As D. N. Rodowick has noted, computer-generated imagery may “actually efface and in some cases entirely...rewrite the actor's body” (6).

outtakes, for instance, attest to the frustrating delays that plagued the production, and also introduce a record of the pro-filmic reality: In one sequence, Monroe attempts to complete a scene with a dog that refuses to respond to cues; and another presents Cukor losing his patience with distracted child actors. Still another series captures the filming of a scene between Martin and Monroe, with the former encouraging the actress to go on with the exchange as she forgets lines and loses her concentration. Martin gives her a quick hug after one take, and after another, he turns to Cukor and remarks, “That was good, though, wasn’t it?” Viewed unto itself, outside of documentary edification, the implications of the exchange – Monroe’s ill health and lack of focus, Martin’s patience and *bonhomie* – are self-evident. In its moments of preproduction material, scripted comedy, and extra-diegetic difficulties, the remaining elements of Something’s Got to Give already provide “non-linear access,” paraphrasing Mulvey, to the film’s creation; and, in this way, supersede the fragmented sensibilities of the new media channels through which it is currently seen. Ultimately, delay is inscribed into the very indexical action of Something’s Got to Give and its rough, unrefined cinematic body.

Once again, however, this raw footage that so illuminates the final days of Monroe and her uncompleted performance relies upon the sophistication of new media technologies for its exhibition and reanimation. It is unlikely that fans and mass audiences would have access to the original archival material; and instead of languishing in the Fox vaults, evidence of Monroe’s performance-in-progress (not to mention those of Martin and Charisse) and Cukor’s direction is available to those who watch The Final Days documentary, or search for “Marilyn Monroe” on YouTube. It could be argued, then, that somewhere between the novelty of the interface and the immediate accessibility of the material endures the intimate dialogue between star, film, and

spectator; the subjective character of cinematic bodies sharing, to return to Sobchack, their “process of being and becoming.”

Certainly, beyond offering access to elusive material, The Final Days chronicles a moment of cultural history that continues to intrigue students and fans of golden-age Hollywood: touching upon the parallel challenges and scandals of Taylor and Burton in Cleopatra and Monroe in Something’s Got to Give as the studio system deteriorated; addressing the fate of a film that had been so promising in its cast and director; and musing upon the last months of Monroe’s life, including the circumstances surrounding her death. Yet like the anonymous processional at Fox Studios glimpsed in the documentary, streaming toward a vague future from an unknown past, Monroe and/in her last film endure with the charge of their real, compelling uncertainty – independent of the narrative constructed by The Final Days. Technical effects do not conjure this emotional affect; and the mysteries of star and film do not demand commentary. Instead, Monroe and Something’s Got to Give imbue their various screens with the inherently “magical and uncanny” sensibilities that, as Mulvey reminds us, motion pictures have always already awakened – no matter how long it takes for them to be seen.

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